EDEA OF EURIPIDES

ranslated from the Greek into
English Verse

BY

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JOHN P. MORTON & COMPANY
LOUISVILLE

Oct. 18[illegible].

PREFACE.

AN attempt has been made in this translation to reproduce some of the peculiarities of Euripides' style, as the alliterations, metaphors, etc.; also, to reproduce the choral meters in all of the Odes where English prosody permits; to change with the Greek poet to and from anapestic versification, and to tincture the anapests of Medea with a few old English forms where they are tinctured in Greek with Doric. By such auxiliary means I believe it more possible than without them to render, though feebly at best, the great tragedian's master-piece.

I have employed the text of Professor F. D. Allen, of Harvard University, and have made free use of his excellent notes; and for whatever suggestions have been received from the works of others, I make grateful acknowledgment.

J. P.

LOUISVILLE MALE HIGH SCHOOL,

September, 1894.

ARGUMENT.

MEDEA, the daughter of the King of Colchis, became enamored of Jason, who, with the other Argonauts, visited her father's kingdom in search of the Golden Fleece. Versed in magic and influenced by her love, she enabled Jason to accomplish the tasks set him by Æetes: the yoking of the fire-breathing bulls, the sowing of the dragon's teeth, the destruction of the resulting crop of warriors, also the slaying of the guardian dragon of the Golden Fleece. She slew her brother Apsyrtus to aid their escape to Greece.

Arrived at Iolcus, where Pelias, Jason's uncle, had usurped the throne rightfully Jason's, Medea brought about the death of Pelias at the hands of his own daughters, persuading them that they could renew their father's youth by boiling him in a kettle with certain enchanted drugs. Jason and Medea fled from the consequence of this crime, and fixed their residence in Corinth, where they lived in peace till Jason, partly through ambition, principally through a new affection, contracted an alliance with Glauce, daughter of Creon, King of Corinth. The abandoned Medea, barbaric in birth and passion, is aroused to frenzy by such treatment; and with this the drama begins.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

MEDEA'S NURSE, *Deuteragonist.*

OLD SLAVE, Guardian of children, *Tritagonist.*

MEDEA, *Protagonist.*

CREON, King of Corinth, *Tritagonist.*

JASON, *Deuteragonist.*

A MESSENGER, *Deuteragonist.*

MEDEA'S TWO SONS.

ÆGEUS, Prince of Athens, *Tritagonist.*

Chorus of Corinthian Women, friendly to Medea.

SCENE.

CORINTH: Front of Medea's house, the Orchestra an open space before it. The palace and Jason's house supposed to be on the right.

MEDEA.

Ὦ δυσθέατον ὄμμα καὶ τόλμης πικρᾶς.

SOPHOKLES.

NURSE.

O would the Argo's hull had never winged
To Colchian coast through the dark-purpled peaks
Of the Symplegades, and ne'er had fallen
The riven pine in Pelion's wooded dells,
Nor had equipped the hands of those heroes
Who went to seek for Pelias the fleece
All-gold; for then had not Medea sailed,
My mistress, to the land Iolcus' towers,
Soul-smitten with the love of Jason;
Nor had she won the maids of Pelias
To slay their sire; seen this Corinthian home
With spouse and sons, gracious to citizens
Whose country she had reached in flight, and prone
To live in peace with Jason. Surest boon
Of man and wife is harmony:
But now discord invades, and tenderest ties
Are languishing; for, false unto my mistress
And her sons, Jason hath left her couch

For royal marriage with Creon's child—
Creon who lords it here in Corinth's realm.
Medea, wretched, disavowed, evokes
The oaths, recalls their plighted hands, the pledge
Most sacred; and implores the gods to view
Jason's perfidious return.
Foodless she lies, whelming herself in grief;
Dissolves herself in tears the tedious time
Since once she knew herself maltreated by
Her husband, nor uplifts her eyes, nor bends
Her visage from the earth, but like a rock
Or deaf sea-wave heeds not her friends' address;
Save ever and anon she turneth her
Neck's snow, and to herself bewaileth sire
And native land and hearth which she betrayed
To follow him who now dishonors her.
And she hath learned, poor wretch! of misery
The blessing of an unforsaken home.
She hates her very sons, delighteth not
Upon their sight. I tremble lest she plan
Some unexpected ill. Deep-purposed is
Her heart and brooks no wrong: I know and fear,
For dread is she, nor who engages her
In hate will easily bear off the meed
Of victory.

But come the children, finished race and game,
All-heedless of their mother's misery.
The heart of youth loves not the haunts of grief!

[*Enter* παιδαγωγός *with two children of* MEDEA.]

SLAVE-GUARDIAN.

Ancient belonging of my mistress' house,
Why standest by the gates in solitude,
Revolving with thyself a weight of woes?
How wills Medea to be left by thee?

NURSE.

Old guardian of Jason's sons,
The woes that fall on masters bring distress
To faithful slaves and fasten on their hearts:
So I have come to such a pass of sorrow,
The impulse driveth me to come and wail
My mistress' fortunes to the earth and heaven.

SLAVE-GUARDIAN.

What! takes the wretch no respite from her groans?

NURSE.

Sweet ignorance! * her grief 's not yet at flood.

* Literally, "I envy thee (thy ignorance)."

SLAVE-GUARDIAN.

Poor fool! if one may speak of mistress thus,
How little dreams she of more recent ills!

NURSE.

What meanest thou, good man? grudge not to say.

SLAVE-GUARDIAN.

Nothing; and I repent me of my words.

NURSE.

Nay, by thy beard, conceal it not from me,
Thy fellow-slave: if need, the secret 's safe.

SLAVE-GUARDIAN.

I heard who said, when seeming not to hear,
Nearing the gaming-place where cronies lounge,
Pirene's hallowed water, that Creon,
King of this realm, will from Corinthian soil
Banish Medea and her sons. I know
Not whether this be true—O would 't were false!

NURSE.

Will Jason brook his children's suffering,
E'en though at variance with his wife?

SLAVE-GUARDIAN.

The old are lesser than the newer ties,
And to this house he is no more a friend.

NURSE.

We perish then, if to the old we ship
An added sea ere this is bailed.

SLAVE-GUARDIAN.

But thou, since 't is not meet my mistress know,
Restrain thy tongue and secret keep the tale.

NURSE.

O children, hear ye what a sire ye have?
Nay! I will not desire him death—he is
My lord—though he unto his friends untrue.

SLAVE-GUARDIAN.

What mortal not? Hast just discovered this,
More than his neighbor loves each man himself,
Some honestly, but some through selfishness,
Seeing a father indifferent to his sons
For nuptials new?

NURSE.

(*To children.*)

Go, children, go—all will be well—within
The mansion.

(*To* SLAVE-GUARDIAN.)

Do thou keep them far aloof,
Nor let them near their frenzied mother; for
I saw her like a maddened bull eye these

As though she 'd injure them; nor will she cease
From wrath, I ween, before she rushes on
Some victim. Be on foe her rage, not friend!

[MEDEA'S *voice is heard within.*]

MEDEA.

Alas! I vain wretch am of labors! Ah, me!
Me! Would that I die!

NURSE.

So is it, dear children, her heart
Your mother exciteth, exciteth her wrath.
Speed, speed ye, and do not encounter her eye,
Nor face her; beware of the savage retreat
And furious instinct of nature morose.
But go now and hasten within, for 't is plain
The cloud of distress on the horizon full soon
Will spread with a much greater fury. What, pray,
Will dare this high-strung and tempestuous soul,
Bitten by wrongs?

[*Exeunt* SLAVE-GUARDIAN *and children.*]

MEDEA.

Alack! alack!
Wretch am I, and have I endured, endured
Woes for which no wailing is great enough. O

Accursèd ye barns of womb hated, may ye
All perishen—sire and my sons and the house!

NURSE.

Ah, me! me! O wretch,
Why should thine own children their father's fault
share?
Why hatest them? Poor things, alas! I do more
Than dread your misfortune; for fearful exists
The arrogance royalty taketh. Controlled
In little, in much absolute, so they set
Aside their resentment with stubbornness. Life
Of humble lot's better a destiny. Be
It mine to grow old grandeurless but secure.
The golden mean's name is a better to speak,
To use brings content most. Transcendency can
Bring mortals naught save revenge from the heavens—
Some angered god—wrecking their houses.

[*Chorus now appears in the Orchestra.*]

CHORUS.

Proöde.

Heard I Medea's voice: and I heard the complaint
Of this wretched
Colchian never appeasèd yet; tell to me,

MEDEA.

Old nurse, for very near to the vestibule*
Of the bi-portaled* mansion heard I the
Groans within, nor am I glad of the suffering,
Woman — her house is endeared to me.

NURSE.

No house is: for all this is vanishéd now
Since Jason the bed woos of royalty's line;
My mistress is wasting existence away
Within her apartments, and taketh in heart
No comfort from words of a friend.

MEDEA.

Alas! alas!
Might lightning from heaven descend through my head!
What profiteth me more the essence of life?
Alas, me! and might death releasen me from
Hated existence!

CHORUS.

Strophe.

Heardest, O Zeus, O earth, and O light,
This sad song which hath drear distress
Taught Medea?

* For metrical purposes both meanings of ἀμφίπυλος have been used.

What longing for dread resting-place
Will e'er, foolish wife, aid thee pass
To death's ultimate sure release?
    Pray not of the gods thus:
    If thy spouse desire
Bloomier bed than thine own,
Be not wroth with him over this:
Thee Zeus will avenge in his might —
    Little repine thou,
Mourning thy wedded mate remiss.

MEDEA.

High Themis and Artemis honored,
Behold what I suffer my spouse from,
Accursèd, to me bound with great oaths?
Whom may I gloat over and his bride
To atoms ground under their roof-tree,
For daring uninjured to harm me.
O father! O home I abandoned,
Disgracefully slaying my brother!

NURSE.

Hear ye her language, her crying aloud
Themis invokèd and Zeus who records
Human oaths? There is no way will her rage
Quiet its transports with paltry result.

CHORUS.

Antistrophe.

Would that Medea welcome our eyes,
Coming to hear kind tone of words
    Spoken to her,
If haply the deep-impressed rage
And wrath of her soul they assuage:
For let not my tenderness' edge
    Dull ever to friendship.
    Nurse, repair in haste,
Tend thou her hither from home;
Tell her of our grave sympathy.
Haste, haste before she hath wrought ill
    Unto the children;
Frenzy portends this calamity.

NURSE.

So will I, though fear if I conquer my mistress:
And freely the favor of this task will grant.
Although such a glance as a tigress with whelps
She casts on her slaves, if a single approach
To utter a word. And if callest thou men
Of olden uncouth and in naught wise, inventing
Refrains at a banquet or private display
Or festival, sounds to enchant the quick ear,

Thou wouldst not mistake; but ne'er mortal his skill
Hath practised to solace with muse and varied
Concordance those Stygian griefs from which deaths
And dreadful calamities make houses fall.
And yet for a man to heal such griefs with music
Were profit. Where sumptuous feasts are, why raise
Vain song, for present abundance of the board
Affords its own joy to ephemerals?

CHORUS.

Epode.

I list to mournful-voicéd agony.
Loudly crying her weight of rue, grievously
Complains Medea of the false bridegroom to her bed.
    Suffering wrongly injuries, calls she
On Zeus' own Themis consecrate, guide of her way far
    Over the night-hooded brine
Unto opposite Greece, on the salt
    Deep sea's impenetrate bar.

[*Enter* MEDEA.]

MEDEA.

Women of Corinth, I have come from home;
Nor blame me. I have known many reserved
Of men, some intimates* and strangers some.

* ὀμμάτων ἀπο, literally *with my eyes*. (A difficult and disputed passage.) J. P.

They in their silent walks of life did gain
Repute for infamy and haughtiness.
For justice sees not with the eyes of those
Who hate unwronged at sight their fellow, ere
They learn his character. The stranger needs
Must carefully conform himself to his
Adopted home; nor have I thought of praising
The citizen who with his airs is rude
Unto his fellow, through ill-breeding.
But as for me, this unexpected thing
Befallen hath crushed my heart. I go and long
For death, despairing of life's weal, my friends.
For he in whom my all, ye clearly know,
Hath proved the basest among men, my husband.
Forsooth of all to which are breath and brain
We women are the sorriest lot, who first
Must buy a husband with the fattest purse,
Then make him despot of our persons too:
Indeed this latter ill 's the bitterer.
Then there 's the mighty risk of getting bad
Or good. Divorces bring no luster to
A woman's fame, nor is it possible
To renounce one's husband.
Thus she who comes among strange laws and rights
Hath need of sense prophetic, an' she hath

Not tried at home the temper of her lord.
And if, our knowledge well-elaborate,
The husband dwells not restive 'neath the yoke,
'T were envied lot; if not, 't were better death.
A man whenever weary of his home
May go abroad and ease his heart of surfeit,
Unto some friend or boon companion turned;
But woman must look to a single soul.
They say we pass a dangerless repose
Indoors, they wield the spear—a foolish thought;
How would I thrice stand to the shield than bear
A single child!
But such discourse applies not unto you.
This is your city, here your fathers' homes,
The sweets of life and intercourse of friends:
But I am destitute and cityless,
Scorned by my lord, brought from barbaric land,
Who have nor mother, brother, relative,
Whither to change my mooring from this sea
Of woe.
This grace I hope from you; if a device
Or way be found to mete revenge unto
My husband for my wrongs, also to him
Who gives his daughter, and to her, the bride,
Be silent. For in other things is woman

Pregnant with fear, timid to look on fight
And steel, but injured in her nuptial bed,
No living heart so murderous.

CHORUS.

I will be silent, for with justice plain
Repay'st thy lord, Medea; nor do I
Marvel thou grievest at thy miseries.
But Creon, see, the king of this domain
Cometh, the messenger of new decrees.

[*Enter* CREON, *with attendants*.]

CREON.

Thou of sullen mien, enraged against
Thy spouse, Medea, I 've resolved, exiled
Shalt pass this country's line and take thy sons,
The twain; and tarry not; for arbiter
Of this my word, I shall not seek my palace
Until I hurl thee from the kingdom's bourn.

MEDEA.

Alas! am I undone, wretch woe-be-gone!
Mine enemies shake out their every reef,
Nor can I put to shore unrocked with ruin.
But I will speak in my distress: Why banish
Me the land, King Creon?

CREON.

I fear thee, nor is there a need to cloak
My words, fear that thou do unto my child
Some ill incurable; and to this fear
Doth much bear part. Shrewd wast thou gendered, skilled
In multifold contrivances of harm;
And art exasperate estranged from him
Who shared thy couch. Mine ear doth tremble with
The threats, they tell thou hurlest at my head,
Who give; at his, the groom, and hers, the bride.
Before these fructify I take my guard,
And better that I now incur thy hate,
Woman, than softened soon lament the worst.

MEDEA.

Lack-aday!
Not now the first, but often, Creon, hath
My fame for knowledge injured me and worked
Me mighty harm. Nor should a prudent man
Instruct his children to be over-wise;
For not to name the charge of sloth such bear,
They gain the rabble's envious dislike;
For offering to clowns some science new
Thou seemest visionary, not a sage.

And if deemèd superior to those
Who boast to have a stock of varied lore,
Thou wilt appear offensive in the State.
So of this fortune do I share the lot:
For being wise, to some I am invidious;
To some repugnant: and but little wise
I am. Thou fearest me, to suffer aught
Discordant. I 've no coign of vantage — fear
Not me, Creon — whence to offend a king.
How hast thou injured me? betroth thy maid
To whom thou wilt. It is my spouse I hate.
But thou, methinks, hast acted wisely thus;
Nor do I envy thee prosperity.
Array thy bride: fare well; but suffer me
To dwell within thy realm, for I will bear
Mine injuries in silence, submissive to
More potent wills.

CREON.

Thou say'st soft things to hear, but inwardly
I shudder that thou plottest something hard.
By so much am I less persuaded than
Before. A woman quick to wrath, just as
A man, is easier to guard against
Than one of silent craftiness.
Begone with all despatch, nor trifle words;

For such is my irrevocable will.
Thou lackest art to tarry here, to me
An enemy.

MEDEA.

Nay, by thy knees and by the new-wed maid!

CREON.

Thy words are lost, for thou canst ne'er persuade.

MEDEA.

And thou wilt banish me, nor heed my prayers?

CREON.

I love not thee more than my family.

MEDEA.

O fatherland, now wells thy memory.

CREON.

So dearest that to me, except my child.

MEDEA.

Alas! alas! how great an evil love.

CREON.

That is, I ween, as circumstances fall.

MEDEA.

Forget not, Zeus, the cause of my distress.

CREON.

Away! fond wretch, relieve me from my cares.

MEDEA.

'T is I have cares, and cares enough I trow.

CREON.

My servants' hands shall quickly thrust thee hence.

MEDEA.

Surely not this, for, Creon, I implore —

CREON.

Thou wilt make trouble, woman, as it seems.

MEDEA.

I flee — my supplication's not of this.

CREON.

Why dost resist, and leavest not my land?

MEDEA.

Permit me to remain this single day
And frame some plan to guide my banishment,
Some resource for my sons, since that their sire
Cares not to make provision for his boys.
Pity them, for thou too art a father,
And it is probable hast tenderness.

For me — I have no dread of banishment,
But weep for them to share my casualty.

CREON.

My nature hath no strain of tyranny:
Through sympathy for others, much have lost.
And now I see myself am wrong, O lady,
Yet take thy prayer, but with it this decree:
If so the coming lamp of God shine on
Thee and thy sons within this country's bounds,
Thou diest. I have said, nor false the word.

[*Exit* CREON *with attendants.*]

CHORUS.

Miserable woman,
Well-a-day! Well-a-day!
Thou vanity of ill,
Whither wilt turn? What shelter from throes,
Hospitable to thee,
Wilt find, of house or soil?
Into such trackless surges of woes
Fate hath brought thee, Medea.

MEDEA.

Everything 's perverse, who will gainsay?
But scarce so bad as that, believe it not.
Still are there trials for the brief-betrothed,

And for the allied, labors not a few.
For thinkest thou that I would ever fawn
Without some hope of gain, or crafty end?
I had not deigned to speak nor touch him with
My hands. But he, to such a pass of folly
Hath come, with power to prison all my plans
In banishment, grants me to wait this day
In which I'll stretch three corses of my foes,
The father and my husband and the bride.
But with a plenitu~~de of roads to death,~~
I know not which to open first, my friends:
Whether consume the bridal house with fire,
Or to implunge the pointed steel into
The princess' vitals, passing with stealthy tread
Within the nuptial chamber. But one thing
Opposes; if I shall be seized entering
The house to prosecute my plans, I die,
Derision of mine enemies.
The straightest road's the best, in which my skill
Is most proficient — them to slay with poison.
Be it so!
And they are dead, what city will receive me?
What host afford asylum or a roof
Secure, and shield my person? There is none.
Awaiting yet a little while if some

Tower of my safety may appear, I 'll plot
The murder in deceit and silence.
And if a hopeless destiny decree
My exile, with the sword in hand, although
I perish, I will kill them; such a pitch
Of daring have I reached.— Not, by my mistress
The whom I honor most of all and choose
Assistant, Hecate who dwells within
The recess of my hearth, shall one of them
Exult at my afflicted heart.
Bitter I 'll make these nuptials to them,
Forlorn to them: bitter this union and
My exile. But enough: Spare nothing of
Thy sciences: Medea, rouse, contrive.
Creep to thy dread design: the game is one
Of nerve. Seest thy wrongs? Thou shouldst not be
A gibe of Sisypheans and of Jason's
Betrothed, who art the breed of noble sire,
Helios —Thy science conjure: and besides
We women are, in noble deeds untaught,
Most cunning artisans of every ill.

CHORUS.

Strophe α'.

Reversèd are consecrate streams' downpouring fountains,

Justice and all substance of things are subvert.
Treacherous purposes bind men; even faith
Plighted to gods, they evaden.
So change will embellish feminine life to a fairer desert;
Honor will favor our race, O Medea:
Never again shall harsh rumor women upbraiden.

Antistrophe α′.

The muses of olden refrains will cease singing us,
Hymning our famed faithlessness unto the shell.
Not unto woman hath Phœbos, the minstrel,
Granted divine voice of his lyre,
As I know, or I would reply to man's song with song of
man's guile.
Mutual relations of master and woman
Lips of long life have gained wisdom to choir.

Strophe β′.

And thou from far home of thy father embarkedst,
Mad in love's ecstacy, parting the deep's double pillars
of stone;
And dwellest on stranger shore,
Having lost the mate of thy widowed
Couch — couch never spread for love more —
An exile and outcast in one,
Dishonored, abandoned.

Antistrophe β′.

And sped is all reverence of oaths divine.
Shame like a tremulous bird hath ta'en flight from great
Greece into heaven.
To thee never more a home
Paternal shall offer moorage,
In waters of trouble aroam:
A princess more potent in charms
Usurpeth thy palace.

[*Enter* JASON.]

JASON.

This is not new, but oft have I perceived
That rugged passion hath no remedy.
For it was thine to share this country, thine
This home, by calm submission to the king's
Designs; and now art driven from the land
For idle words. Of me, I do not care:
Go on forever with thy chattering
That Jason is the worst of men; but deem,
For threats against the royal family,
Clear gain thy punishment is exile sole.
Forever did I try to stay the tide
Of royal wrath, and wished thee to remain;
But from thy folly wouldst thou not depart,

Reviling aye the sovereigns; wherefore
Art banished. Spite of this I do not fail
My friends, but come providing for thy good,
Woman, that thou may'st not be outcast with
Thy children, penniless and in the need
Of aught. For exile drags many an ill
Within its wake, and though thou hatest me,
I could not ever wish thee harm.

MEDEA.

O utterly-depraved, for this have I
To tell thee, worst reproach my lips can frame,
Hast come to us, hast come of hostile heart?
Such is not manliness nor bravery,
To injure friends, then seek to gloat o'er them;
But of all human maladies, most foul—
Audacity. Yet well didst thou to come,
For with reproaches shall I vent my heart,
And thou be pained to hear.
Will from the very first I first recount:
I saved thee; as such Hellenes do know
Who with thee entered in the Argo's hull,
With thee enjoined to yoke the fire-breath'd bulls
And strew the direful crop. The dragon which
Guarded the Golden Fleece with tangled folds,

Sleepless ever, I slew, and held to thee
The light of safety. I betrayed my sire,
My home, to flee with thee to Pelion
Iolcus, more impulsive than more wise.
And Pelias I caused to die by death –
The most imbittered death — his daughters' hands.
I banished every fear. O basest man,
For this returnest treachery, thyself;
Procurest other bed, though children born:
Perchance, if childless yet, I might forgive
Thy new infatuation. Thus, vain is
The faith of oaths: nor can my thought surmise
Whether thou dreamest the gods no longer reign,
Or have enacted newer rights for men,
Since thou art conscious of thy perjury.
Alas! right hand which thou so oft hast grasped;
Alas! these knees, how vainly were we clasped
This villain by, how have we missed our hopes!
But hold! shall I commune with thee as friend,
Expecting to receive favors of thee?
Yet be it so: for questioned baser thou'lt
Appear: Whither shall I betake me now?
Is it unto my father's house, whom I
Betrayed with fatherland, to follow thee?
Is it unto the miserable maids

Of Pelias? a fine reception would
They tender me who slew their sire: for so
It is. I am an enemy to those
At home, and by my services to thee,
At war with whom my thankless hand hath harmed.
Surely for this thou hast exalted me
A name for happiness to Grecian dames.
I have in thee a wondrous spouse and true,
Wretch that I am, if I shall flee the land,
Banished, deserted, lonely with my waifs.
A fine reflection on the brave bridegroom,
That beggars do thy children roam and I,
Thy savior.
O Zeus, why hast thou granted unto man
A true touch-stone for gold that 's spurious:
Not on his person pressed a natural stamp
By which to know the villain?

CHORUS.

Dread is that anger and of quenchless life,
Whenever friends with friends enkindle strife.

JASON.

I must, it seems, have no unskillful tongue,
But as the prudent helmsman of a ship
With close-reefed sails run hard before the storm,

O woman, of thy never-weary gabble.
For me, so valuest thy favors thou,
I deem that Cypris of the gods and men
Was my sole rescuer from shipwreck.
Thou hast a subtile mind, and as the speech
Would be indelicate that Eros drove
Thee with unerring shafts to save my life,
I leave the subject with this single hint;
For where thou aidedst me, 't is not amiss:
That more however from my safety thou
Hast since received than given, I shall show.
And first thy dwelling-place is Greece instead
Of land barbaric, and thou knowest right
And benefit of laws unswayed by force.
So, all the Greeks confess thy cleverness,
And fame is thine. But if thou dwelledst in
Remote confines of earth, thou wert obscure.
And may there ne'er be gold within my halls,
Nor mine to hymn a sweeter song than Orpheus,
If fortune leave me unto fame unknown.
So much upon my labors I have said,
For thou the wordy contest didst provoke.
And as to thy reproaches on my head
For royal marriage, first I shall prove
Myself discreet, then chaste, and thirdly thy

Great friend, and too my children's: only hear.
When from Iolcus hither I had come,
O'erwhelmed with many dire calamities,
What happier fortune could I find than this,
A refugee to wed a monarch's child?
Not, as doth fret thee, cloyed with thy bed,
Smitten with longing for another bride,
Nor eager for more numerous offspring.
My children are enough—no fault in this:
But that, and most important, we might dwell
In comfort, not constrained with want. I know
That every friend flees far the pauper's path;
And I would rear my children as becomes
My house, begetting brothers to thy heirs:
Exalt them to one rank and family,
And live in honor; for, what need hast thou
Of children more? and it would profit me
To help the living by a future stock.
Have I determined ill? thou wouldst not say
Did not thy love-bed nettle thee.
To such a point have women come, that if
Your couch is well, ye fancy all secure:
But if some casualty befall your bed,
Ye count the fairest and the best as lost.
Oh! would that mortals might beget their young

From other source, the race of women not —
So would there be no evil under heaven!

CHORUS.

Well, Jason, hast thou gilded thy discourse;
Yet I, although I speak against thy mind,
Must deem thee to thy lady treacherous,
To justice, blind.

MEDEA.

Surely in much I disagree with men.
To me at least the unjust man who is
Ready of speech deserves the heaviest
Penalty. Presumptuous with his tongue
To gloss injustice; he is bold in wrong,
Yet is not overwise, for instance thou—
Hadst best not try on me thy brilliancy
And rhetoric. One word will trip thee.
It was thy duty, if thou wast not false,
First to convince me, then contract this match;
But not to keep it secret from thy friends.

JASON.

A fine conformity wouldst thou have made
Unto this argument, if I had told
Thee of my marriage, who wilt not now
Endure to abate thy heart's big rage.

MEDEA.

Not this restrained thee. A barbaric mate
Had brought thee disrepute in thy gray years.

JASON.

Nay, be convinced of this, 't is not the bride
Impelled me to the couch of kings I win,
But as I said before, 't is the desire
To aid thyself and gender for my sons
Brothers of regal blood, a bulwark for
Our house.

MEDEA.

Be mine no life of a golden sorrow,
Nor mine the wealth which frets the spirit's peace.

JASON.

Knowest with altered wish thou wouldst appear
More wise? Ne'er let the good seem bitter to
Thy sense; when fortune smiles, deem not she frowns.

MEDEA.

Be insolent, since thou hast refuge here,
And I forlorn shall flee this country's terms.

JASON.

Thus hast thou made thy choice; no other blame.

MEDEA.

How, pray? by marrying, betraying thee?

JASON.

By impious curses on the sovereigns.

MEDEA.

I might be too a curse upon thy house.

JASON.

Stay! I will not dispute thus more with thee.
But if thou wouldst receive aught of my wealth,
Assistance to thy sons and to thy flight,
Speak out; since readily with lavish hand
I'll give and send the pledge-bone to guest-friends *
Who thence will favor thee. Refusing this,
Woman, thou play'st the fool: ceasing from wrath
Thy profit will be more.

MEDEA.

I would not trust guest-friends of such as thou,
Nor would receive of thine, so proffer not.
Gifts of the wicked bring no luck with them.

* "In contracting *ξενία*, guest and host broke a small bone, and retained each a half."—ALLEN.

JASON.

In anywise I call the gods to prove
That I would aid thee and thy sons in all.
But blessings please thee not, with haughtiness
Dost thou reject thy friends: whence more thy griefs.

MEDEA.

Away! no doubt the longing for thy new-
Mate maid doth seize thee from the palace stayed.
Wed her; perhaps, with God's will be it said,
'T will be a match thy future would revoke.

[*Exit* JASON.]

CHORUS.

Strophe a'.

The Loves in excess bring nor virtue nor fame;
    But if Cypris gently should come,
No goddess of heaven so pleasing a dame:
Yet never, O mistress, in sure passion steeped,
    Aim at me thy gold bow's barbéd flame.

Antistrophe a'.

May temperance watch o'er me, best gift of the gods,
    May ne'er to wild wrangling and strife
Dread Cypris impel me soul-pierced with strange lust;
But with favoring eye on the quarrelless couch
    Spread she wisely the love-bed of wife.

Strophe β′.

Oh fatherland! Oh native home!
Never cityless
May I tread the weary path of want,
Ever pitiless
And full of doom!
But on that day to death, to death be slave!
Without a country 's worse than in a grave.

Antistrophe β′.

Mine eye hath seen, nor do I muse
On other's history.
Nor home nor friend bewails thy nameless pangs.
Perish dismally
The fiend who fails
To cherish friends, turning the guileless key
Of candor's gate! Such friend be far from me!

[*Enter* ÆGEUS.]

ÆGEUS.

Medea, hail! for than this prelude of
My speech no one can offer friend more fair.

MEDEA.

And thou too hail, son of wise Pandion,
Ægeus, whence dost thou tread this country's plain?

ÆGEUS.

From Phœbos' ancient shrine of oracle.

MEDEA.

What mission took thee to the earth's white* nave?

ÆGEUS.

To search how seed of children spring for me.

MEDEA.

By heaven, is yet thy life unblest with child?

ÆGEUS.

Yea, through some deity's design it is.

MEDEA.

Hast thou a wife, or unto wedlock strange?

ÆGEUS.

I am not yokeless of the marriage bond.

MEDEA.

What pray hath Phœbos said to thee of child?

ÆGEUS.

Words wiser than a man may comprehend.

* A white stone in the nave of the temple at Delphi was thought to mark the earth's center.

MEDEA.

May I in piety learn his response?

ÆGEUS.

Thou may'st, since there is need of wisdom's skill.

MEDEA.

What said he? Speak, if it is right to hear.

ÆGEUS.

I must not loose the bag's protruding foot—

MEDEA.

Ere thou do what or in what land arrive?

ÆGEUS.

Ere I do reach again my native hearth.

MEDEA.

What prompts thee then to sail unto this coast?

ÆGEUS.

There is one Pitheus, Trazene's king.

MEDEA.

Of Pelops' sons most pious, as they say.

ÆGEUS.

I would commune with him the god's reply.

MEDEA.

Yea, he is wise and in such matters versed.

ÆGEUS.

And unto me the dearest of spear-friends.

MEDEA.

May'st thou succeed and learn thy whole research.

ÆGEUS.

But why thine eye and color thus care-worn?

MEDEA.

Ægeus, my spouse is worse than false to me.

ÆGEUS.

What say'st? explain to me thy sufferings.

MEDEA.

Jason doth injure me, in nothing wronged.

ÆGEUS.

What hath he done? Nay, tell me candidly.

MEDEA.

He makes a new wife mistress of his house.

ÆGEUS.

He surely hath not dared so base a deed?

MEDEA.

Too well he hath, his former ties disdained.

ÆGEUS.

Induced by love or cloyed with thy charms?

MEDEA.

By mighty passion made untrue to friends.

ÆGEUS.

Then let him go, if wicked as thou sayest.

MEDEA.

He was delighted with the royal bands.

ÆGEUS.

Who gives the bride? Continue thy account.

MEDEA.

Creon who rules the realm of Corinth here.

ÆGEUS.

Then, lady, pardonable is thy grief.

MEDEA.

I am undone, ay, driven from the land.

ÆGEUS.

By whom? this adds new weight unto thy wrongs.

MEDEA.

Creon from Corinth driveth me exiled.

ÆGEUS.

Will Jason suffer it to his reproach?

MEDEA.

Not speciously, but he will brave it out.—
By this thy beard and these thy knees I pray
Thee and become a suppliant, pity,
Pity me, wretched that I am, nor see
Me banished destitute; but take me to
Thy country and thy hearth. So by the gods
Thy hope of children soon be perfected!
And may'st thou live in happiness to death!
Thou knowest not the fortune thou hast found,
For I will free thee from a sterile lot
And make thee blest with child — such charms I know.

ÆGEUS.

For many reasons, lady, am I prone
To grant this charity, first for the gods,
And secondly for the children whose birth
Thou promisest, since in this blessing I
Am helpless quite. And thus my purpose is,
If thou shalt come unto my country, I
Will try in justice to befriend thy need.

But from this land thyself withdraw thy foot,
For I would make no breach of friendly ties.

MEDEA.

So shall it be. And if thou givest pledge
Of this, thy favors will be most complete.

ÆGEUS.

And trustest not my faith? What is the fault?

MEDEA.

I trust thee, but the house of Pelias
And Creon too are hostile to my cause.
If bound to me by oaths, at their request
Who force me from the land, thy piety
Would not resign me; but if held by words,
Unsworn of heaven, thou mightst be their friend,
And soon an embassy persuade their plea.
My means are weak, and theirs the potency
Of wealth and crown.

ÆGEUS.

Much prudence in thy words, O lady.
If such thy wish, I do not hesitate:
For so to me this seems the safest plan.
To show I have some pretext to thy foes,
Would help thy interests. So name thy gods.

MEDEA.

Swear by the realm of Earth and by the Sun,
Sire of my sire: by all the race of heaven,
Swear.

ÆGEUS.

That I will do or not do what? declare.

MEDEA.

Nor wilt thou ever banish me thy land,
Nor if some other, of my foes, attempt,
Wilt ever give me up, with life and will.

ÆGEUS.

I swear by Earth and holy reverence
Of yonder Sun and all the hosts of heaven
Observance of thy prayer.

MEDEA.

Enough; and what the penalty if broken?

ÆGEUS.

Such as befalls the impious of men.

MEDEA.

Go on thy way in happiness, for all
Is well. And I shall hasten to thy home

With utmost speed, when my intents are done
And when my wishes are fulfilled.

[*Exit* ÆGEUS.]

CHORUS.

The son of Maia,* king and guide,
Attend thee to thy home. Abide
With thee success in what thy hopes
Impatient span.
Ægeus, to me thou seemest, tried,
A noble man.

MEDEA.

O Zeus, Justice of Zeus and Light of Sun!
Friends, we shall be now victors of our foes,
At last have found the road: now enters hope
Of wreaking vengeance on mine enemies.
For where I labored most this man appeared
The haven of my counsels, and from him
Shall stretch the cable of my keel arrived
At Pallas' town and citadel.† And now
I shall declare to thee my purposes;
Nor do expect words of a pleasant strain.
One of my company shall I dispatch,
And pray that Jason come again to me;

* Hermes. † Athens.

And when he comes, with honeyed words I 'll say
That his designs seem right and all is well.
And I shall pray him that my sons remain,
Not purposing to leave on hostile soil
These twain to enemies' insults, but that
With treachery I may kill the monarch's child.
For I shall send them, presents in their hands
To bear the bride, a plea to stay their exile,
A filmy robe and wreath of woven gold.
And if she take the ornaments and bind
Them on her, she deplorably shall die
And all who touch the maiden; with such drugs
I'll steep the offerings. Here I dismiss
This narrative, to speak with deep lament
Of what I then must do. My children will
I slay, nor is there who shall rescue them.
The house of Jason thus confused in woe,
I 'll leave the land, fleeing the murder's curse
Of my belovéd children — having dared
A deed most impious.
It is intolerable to be mocked,
O friends, by enemies.—Away! what good
To me is life? I have nor fatherland
Nor home nor refuge from calamities.
Then was my error when I left my home

Paternal, won over by a Grecian's words,
Who by the aid of heaven shall pay the price:
For never more offspring of me alive
Shall glad his eyes, nor of his newly-wed
Princess shall he beget an heir, since fate
Decrees the wretch shall perish wretchedly
By my enchantments.
Let no one deem me paltry, weak nor mild,
But of a spirit contrary; to foes,
Implacable, and unto friends, benign:
For of such mortals is the life most famed.

CHORUS.

Since thou to us thy purpose hast disclosed,
Wishing to help both thee and man's decrees,
I would dissuade thee from such infamies.

MEDEA.

I have no other course, and yet for thee
To say such things is pardonable, for
Thou hast not suffered grievously as I.

CHORUS.

But, woman, wilt thou dare thy two to slay?

MEDEA.

Yea, for my husband will be most distressed.

CHORUS.

And thou most wretched of thy sex, alway.

MEDEA.

So let it be. All intervening words
Are useless.

[*To* NURSE, *who has come out of the house.*]

But make haste and Jason bring;
For in all deeds of trust I honor thee:

[*To* CHORUS.]

And do thou mention naught of my designs,
If favorest thy mistress and art woman.

[*Exit* NURSE.]

CHORUS.

Strophe α′.

Erectheus' race hath forever
Been fortunate, the Blessed Band's
Own cions nurtured on wisdom renowned at the breast of a country divine
Never ravished by conquerors' hands; who ever daintily wander through most ambrosial air:
In whose realm, saith the legend, did gold-haired Harmonia
The nine pure muses of Pierus bear.

Antistrophe α′.

Of Cephisus the fair-flowing
Is famed Cypris dippeth the stream,
And cooling the genial breath of the wind wafts it lightly o'er Athens,
The land of perennial gleam; and ever wreathing her tresses with rose-flowers' odorous plaits,
Sendeth companions to wisdom such Loves as are temperate,
Of multifold virtues the chaste help-mates.

Strophe β′.

How then shall this city of tide
Sacred, or country safe
Harbor unto its friends
Hold thee an infanticide,
Impious wretch among men?—
Ponder thy children's death:
Ponder the crime thou assumest:
Do not by thy knees we implore
Thee, pleading with every breath,
Murder thine offspring!

Antistrophe β′.

Whence, whence can a daring of will,
Or of the hand or heart,

Daughter, impel thee
To finish this hideous ill?
How shall eyes bent on thy boys
Be tearless at murder's woe?—
Never canst thou stain thy right hand
Crimson with their blood when they kneel,
Thy suppliant children, though
Ruthless thy spirit!

[*Enter* JASON.]

JASON.

Thou hast bidden and I am here; for even
If hostile, yet thou shouldst not be deprived
Of such a service, but I will give ear
To what new thing, woman, be now thy whim.

MEDEA.

Jason, I pray thee pardon for past words:
To bear my anger with is right for thee,
Because of many mutual services.
I have engaged myself in argument,
Myself rebuked: foolish why do I rave?
Why do I threaten those who wish me well?
Why am I angry with my sovereigns
And with my husband who designeth best
For us in marrying a princess bride,

To gender royal brothers for my sons?
Shall I not cease from ire? What thinking of
Am I, seeing the gods provide me good?
Have I not children, do I know we flee
Iolcus and are scarce of friendly aids?
Reflecting thus I have perceived my lack
Of prudence, and unreasonable wrath.
Therefore I now commend thee; and thou seemest
Discreet to gain this tie for us, and I
A fool, who rather should coöperate
In these designs, help perfect them, assist
The bridal pomp, be pleased to tend thy bride.
But we are what we are, nor evil meant,
We women!
It is not right for thee to imitate
My follies nor return vain words for vain.
I ask indulgence and confess my wrong:
But now I have designed a better course.
Children, children, come from out the house:

[*Enter children with* SLAVE-GUARDIAN.]

Advance, embrace your father: speak to him
With me, and with your mother cease from rage
Against our friends; for there is peace, and anger
Hath passed away. Clasp his right hand—Oh! woe
Is me! how I divine some hidden ill!—

Will ye, my children, thus in length of days
Stretch out your lovéd arms? Wretch that I am,
How I am full of weeping, full of fear!
Having at last resolved my quarrel with
Your father, thus have I filled my tender glance
With tears.

CHORUS.

Mine eyes, too, glisten with the tears' fresh flow:
Greater than now may not the evil grow.

JASON.

Lady, I praise this course, nor blame the past:
For it is natural the female sex
Make quarrel with their lords who secretly
Contract new nuptials. Howe'er, thy heart
Hath changed for better, and in time thyself
Hast known the victor plan. Such is the act
Of wisdom: and, my sons, not thoughtlessly
Your sire hath taken measures multifold
Of providence with the Eternals' aid.
For of this land of Corinth ye methinks
Will hold first rank beside your royal brothers,
But wax in strength: your father and of gods
Who is propitious will the rest effect.
May I behold you reach the age of bloom
In healthy flower, superior to my foes.

MEDEA.

And thou, why dost suffuse with dew of tears
Thine orbs, averting thus thy snowy cheek;
And not with smiles receive mine utterance?

MEDEA.

'T is nothing, I am dreaming of my boys.

JASON.

Take heart now, for myself will care for them.

MEDEA.

So shall I, nor will yet distrust thy words.
But woman's sex was born to tears.

JASON.

Poor woman, why dost grieve so for thy sons?

MEDEA.

I am their mother, and when thou didst pray
That they might live, a flood of pity came
Upon me, if the fates allow.—But why
Thou camest to me in conference, some hath
Been said, the rest I shall declare.
Since it appeareth to the powers meet
To ask me from the land, seemeth this course
Best also unto me. I know it well,
A hinderance to thee and to the lords

Of Corinth, I should not remain, who seem
Invidious to the palace. I depart
From out this realm a fugitive, but that
The children may be reared by thine own hand,
Pray Creon not to make them share this flight.

JASON.

I doubt if I prevail, but fain would try.

MEDEA.

Exhort the bride herself to pray her sire,
The children be not driven hence with me.

JASON.

Most heartily, and believe I shall persuade.

MEDEA.

If she is one like others of her sex.
I also will assist thee in the task,
For I will send her presents which transcend
By far, I know, beauty man's eye hath seen,
My sons to offer them. With utmost speed
Some menial of my train the ornaments
Convey. She shall be envied not in one
But thousand instances; in gaining thee,
The best of consorts, and in owning spoils
Which once Helios, sire of my sire, bequeathed

To his descendants. Take this dowry, sons,
And bear it in your hands unto the princess:
Present it to the happy bride. Such gifts
She shall receive as not to be despised.

JASON.

And why, improvident, despoil thy hands?
Thinkest a palace hath a lack of robes?
Thinkest a palace hath a lack of gold?
Preserve them; give them not away, for if
The lady deems me worth account, I know
Full well she will prefer my wish to gold.

MEDEA.

Nay, do not cross me. Gifts, the saying runs,
Affect the very gods, and gold is more
Persuasive than a thousand words to man —
The smile of Fortune, Glauce's: her circumstance
The goddess props; young and a princess, she.
The exile of my children I would give
My very life to stay, not gold alone.
But, children, enter ye the sumptuous house
Unto your father's newer spouse, my mistress.
Beseech her; pray her not to banish you.
Present these splendors: most important this,
No hand but hers receive the regal robes.

Proceed with all dispatch, and may ye be
Fair messengers, in good success, unto
Your mother of what her ardent heart desires.

[*Exeunt* JASON, SLAVE-GUARDIAN, *and children.*]

CHORUS.

Strophe α′.

Hopes fade, no more the children's lives illuminate:
No more, for already they part to a deadly fate.
Receiveth the ill-destined bride the gold head-bands;
Receiveth her doom in their bane:
And bindeth her yellow hair in Hades' gems
With the grace of her own twin hands.

Antistrophe α′.

The ambrosial charm and sheen will soon persuade
The woman to deck herself in a robe gold-plaid
And circlet. She drapeth anon as bride of the dead;
In such a webbing of fate
And death is she caught, the princess forlorn,
Nor will ever untangle the thread.

Strophe β′.

Thou, wretch, unhappy groom who wouldst mate among
kings, on thy sons'
Lives, in ignorant bliss,

Bringest destruction, and pitiable death to thy couch
and princess.
Ill-starred, how far dost thy destiny miss!

Antistrophe β′.

My wailing song I tune to thy woe, desperate mother
Of the boys, who murderest
Thy babes because of a new bridal bed with a stranger
pressed
By false Jason who leaves thee an outcast.

[*Enter* SLAVE-GUARDIAN *with children.*]

SLAVE-GUARDIAN.

These sons of thine, my mistress, are reprieved
From exile, and the royal bride with joy
The gifts hath taken in her hands; and there
Is peace unto the children from this source
At least—Ah!
Why dost thou stand confused when fortunate?

MEDEA.

Ah me! ah me!

SLAVE-GUARDIAN.

This is not fitted to the news I bear.

MEDEA.

Once more, ah me!

SLAVE-GUARDIAN.

Do I unconsciously announce some ill
And fail to be the harbinger of good?

MEDEA.

Thou hast announced what hast. I blame not thee.

SLAVE-GUARDIAN.

Why then bendest thine eyes suffused with tears?

MEDEA.

There is much need, old man; for heaven and I
Devising ill together, this contrived.

SLAVE-GUARDIAN.

Take heart: Yet through thy sons thou 'lt be restored.

MEDEA.

I, wretched, others shall restore first.

SLAVE-GUARDIAN.

Not thou alone art severed from thy sons.
Who mortal is must bear calamity
With cheerful soul.

MEDEA.

And so I will. But enter in the house,
Thou, and provide my sons their daily needs.

[*Exit* SLAVE-GUARDIAN.]

O children, children, yours a city is
And home in which—abandoned wretched I—
Forever destitute of mother's care
Ye needs must dwell, and I an exile go
To other land, before I had delight
In you and saw you prosperous; before
I blessed your match and wife and bridal couch,
And carried the nuptial torch. Oh me!
Most miserable for my waywardness!
In vain I nurtured you, O children mine;
In vain I laboured and was racked with throes,
Enduring childbirth's cruel agony.
Once surely, hapless, I had many hopes
In you that ye would cherish my old age
And would compose my corse with tender hands:
A mortal's enviable lot!
Already now the sweet hope perishes.
For destitute of you I shall prolong
A mournful life and bitter unto me:
And ye no longer with belovéd eyes
Will look upon a mother—passed into
A different destiny. Alas! alas!
Why do ye, children, fix on me your eyes?
Why do ye smile the very last of smiles?
Ah me! what shall I do? for heart is failing,

Women, when I behold my sons' bright glance.
I can not do it. Fare ye well, designs
I entertained. I'll lead my boys afar.
What profits me to grieve by ills of these
Their father, and possess myself ills twice
As great? Nay, surely not. Farewell, my plans—
And yet what am I thinking of? wish I
To be the laughing-stock of enemies
Unpunished left? The deed, it must be dared.
Shame on my weakness, that soft words should slip
My spirit. Go, my sons, into the house.
To whom it is profane my sacrifice
To witness, let him look out: my hand I shall
Not weaken. But alas! alas!
Do not, my soul, I pray, not thou attempt
This deed. Let them alone, O wretch, and spare
Thy sons. There* shall they live with us, and there
Bring thee delight—nay, by the infernal
Furies of Pluto's reign, it shall ne'er be
That I afford my sons to enemies'
Insults! The lots are cast, and shall not fail.
And now, upon her brow the crown, princess
And bride she perishes within the robes,
Well do I know. But since most gloomy way

* In Athens.

I tread, and these by gloomier still shall send,
I wish to bid my sons farewell. Children,
Extend, extend your right hands to your mother's
Kisses. O dearest hands and dearest lips
To me, and form and noble countenance
Of my children! be prosperous but—there:*
All here your father hath bereft. O sweet
Embrace, O tender skin, most fragrant breath!—
Away! away! no longer am I fit
To look upon you, but am overcome
By woes. I know, 't is true, the evils I
Shall dare, and yet my wrath is master of
My better judgment: and this is the cause
Which probes the quick of human misery.

CHORUS.

Already in subtiler speeches
I often disputed; in season
Did ponder discussions more weighty
Than wonted to feminine reason;
For we have a muse who indwelleth
Our bosoms, the wisdom-inspiring.
Not all of us, only a portion—
One instance in many, inquiring,

* In Hades. Children suppose that she means in Athens.

Mayhap thou wouldst find—
Are museless, of woman-kind meaning.
I venture, then, whoso of mortals
Unfettered in marriage, hath never
Begotten an offspring, the portals
Of blessings are nearer than him to
Whom children consigned.
The childless, through ignorance whether
To mortals an anguish or joyance
Children are begotten, without them
Are guarded from untold annoyance.
To whom there hath bloomed in their houses
An offspring like delicate blossom
Behold I forever are anxious,
How first these wax fair from the bosom,
Then how they be left with good substance:
Yet, after, one can not unravel
If for good or wicked his labor.
An evil
To all who are human now cometh,
The crowning of all of this seeming:
For grant that they've gained them a fortune;
The grace of their children be beaming
Maturely; their virtue be constant:
If it be their destiny, faded

To Hades, Death beareth their bodies.—
What profit, to other woes mated
Men take this unbearable anguish
At hands of the gods — all for children?

MEDEA.

My friends, for long the issue I await
And anxiously expect what happens there.
I now behold a slave of Jason's train
Advancing, and his panting breath declares
He is the messenger of evil new.

[*Enter* MESSENGER.]

MESSENGER.

O thou, who impiously hast contrived
This heinous deed, flee, flee, nor leave untried
The ocean's wain nor the earth-scouring car.

MEDEA.

What hath been done which merits such a flight?

MESSENGER.

The maiden princess hath but just expired,
And too her sire, Creon, through thy spells.

MEDEA.

O happiest words! Hereafter in my friends
And benefactors shalt thou be.

MESSENGER.

What sayest thou? Art in thy senses, woman,
Or art bereft who dost rejoice to hear
The household of thy king destroyed, and still
Not fear the consequence?

MEDEA.

I could add words to these to answer thine!
Be not excited, friend, but tell me how
They died; for twice as much delight is mine
If perished they all-miserably.

MESSENGER.

Thy twofold stem of children had approached
And entered with their sire the bridal halls:
We vassals who were troubled with thy woes
Rejoiced, and straightway through the palace spread
The tale that thou and Jason had resolved
The former quarrel. And one kissed the hands,
Another kissed thy children's yellow heads,
And I myself followed in ecstacy
Into the women's chambers with thy boys.
My mistress, whom we reverence now instead
Of thee, before she saw the twain of thine,
Upon Jason held fixed her eager glance;
But afterward she veiled her eyes and turned

Aside her milky cheek, annoyed by
The entrance of thy sons. Thy husband quelled
The wrath and passion of the maid with these:
"Be not thou wroth with friends; from anger cease,
And turn again thy head, esteeming those
As friends whome'er thy husband holds as such:
Receive the presents, and pray of thy sire
The children's exile be revoked, for sake
Of me." And when she saw the ornaments,
She did not hesitate but pleased her lord
In all. Even before their father and
Thy sons had left the palace far, she took
The varied robes, and looped them on, setting
The golden wreath upon her ringlets; dressed
Her tresses in the gleaming glass, with smiles
Upon the lifeless phantom of her form.
And afterward arising from her seat
She crossèd her apartments, daintily
Gliding with snow-white foot, pleased with her gifts;
Oft and often on tip-toe raised, with eyes
Askance.
Then surely was a fearful spectacle.
For changing hue she turnèd faltering back
With trembling limbs, and scarcely did she throw
Herself upon the cushions to avoid

Plunging amain. A certain beldam then
Among her slaves, supposing that the wrath
Of Pan or other god had come upon
Her, muttered a prayer, until she saw
The white froth ooze from Glauce's mouth, and of
Her eyes the rolling balls; her bloodless skin.
Then in a different strain from murmured praying
Burst forth a mighty shriek.
Straightway slave hastened to her father's house,
And one unto her recent spouse, to tell
The bride's bewrecking, and all the vaulted
Palace rang to the crowded running feet.
And now a speedy limb with tendons strained
Had reached the goal of twice three plethra's span,
When she from speechlessness and fastened lips
With dreadful groans aroused—the wretched maid.
A twofold agony was racking her:
The golden wreath which rested on her head,
Most wonderful, sent forth a stream of all-
Devouring flame; the fine-spun robes, the gifts
Of thy children, fed on the milky flesh
Of the ill-fated princess.
And starting from her cushions, wrapped in fire
She fled, tossing her locks and head on this
Side and on that, eager to tear away

The fillet, but the gold held close the clasps;
And, too, the flame, as often as she shook
Her hair, glared forth with fury doubled, till
She pitchéd to the floor o'ercome with agony,
And hard to recognize e'en for her sire.
Nor more the luster of her eyes was clear,
Nor yet her noble visage, for the blood
Mingled with fire dripped from the summit of
Her head, and from her bones kept dropping flesh,
As from the pine the pitchy tear, rotten
With poison's secret fangs—a dreadful sight!
And all were fearful of the body's touch,
For her calamity had taught us fear.
But her unhappy father, ignorant
Of Glauce's fate, with sudden haste entering
The house, fell prostrate on the corpse, and wailed
Forthwith, and folding her within his arms,
He kisséd her with this lament:
"O miserable child, what power hath thus
Deplorably destroyed thee? who makes
My hoary grave bereaved of thee? Oh me!
May death envelop me with thee, my child!"
And when he ceased his groans and loud laments,
Attempting to uplift his aged form
He stuck, as doth the ivy to the shoots of bay,

Unto the delicate robes: and fearful was
The struggle. For he strove to raise his knee,
In turn the body held him fast: and if
He strained with violence, from off his bones
He tore away the ancient flesh.
At length he ceased and loosed his soul, ill-starred;
For longer could he not endure the bane.
And there they lie, daughter and aged sire,
Corpses by one another's side, a fate
Of tears' delight. And thine be not a part
Of my discourse, for thou wilt know some shift
From punishment.
Not now the first time do I estimate
Man's lot a shade, nor would my tongue at least
With hesitancy say that those of men
Reputed wise, searchers of happy saws,
Deserve the heaviest punishment, for man
Of mortal breath 's not born for happiness.
In riches' flood one may be luckier than
His fellow, but happy — never!

CHORUS.

It pleaseth god inflict this day
In equity many a woe
On Jason.

Unhappy, how deplore we
Thy destiny, O Creon's maid
Who vanishest to Hades' sway,
By reason of thy marriage-bed
With Jason.

MEDEA.

My friends, this course hath firmly been devised
By me, with utmost speed to slay my sons,
And put forth from this land, nor lead delay,
To give my children to more hostile hand
To murder; for at all events they die.
Since such their fate, then I who gave them life
Shall kill them. So, my spirit, arm thyself.
Why do we falter to perform this deed
Of dread, yet of necessity?
Come, O unhappy hand, grasp thou the blade;
Grasp, and bend thee to the bitter post of life.
Play not the coward, nor reflect how dear
Thy children are, and that thou art a mother.
For this brief day forget the sons of thee;
The long to-morrows mourn: for even if
Thou slayest them, still are they dear, and I
A woman made acquaint with sorrows!

[*Exit* MEDEA *into the house.*]

CHORUS.

Strophe α′.

O Earth, and thou Pellucid Glance
Of the Sun, look, look thou down upon
This desperate woman: hold the hand which aims
The suicidal murder of its own.
These streams have sprung from the Golden Fount,
And there is fear that blood divine will spill
By mortal's stroke.
But thou, O god-born Light, her hand dissuade,
Environ her; expel from the house this jade
Of frenzy, by the Furies' lash blood-mad.

Antistrophe α′.

Lost strays thy vain guardian-care
Of the children; vain hast thou gendered young,
O thou who didst pierce the inhospitable pass
Where the Symplegades' darkling crags hung.
Dread princess, why should the weight of wrath
O'erwhelm thee, and malignant murder turn
Upon thy head?
For grievous are human ills, commensurate
With stains of kindred blood diffused in the state —
Vengeance of gods on house with guilt replete! *

* The last verses of this antistrophe are obscure and corrupt. I have interpreted the text as if written, ὁμογενεῖ μιάσματι, which is at least intelligible, even if it does not reach the root of the matter.—J. P.

BOYS (*within*).

Alas! alas!

Strophe β.′

CHORUS.

Hearest? dost thou hear the children's cry?
O wretch, O woman of foul destiny!

BOY *a′*.

What shall I do, my mother's hands to flee?

BOY *β′*.

I know not, dearest brother: we shall die.

CHORUS.

The portal have I reached? Then I design
The children's murder to stay.

BOYS.

Yea, save us by the gods, we are in ail,
So near unto the ruthless ruin of steel.

CHORUS.

Wretch, thou wert made of rock or iron to kill
The fruit of thy pangs with thy hand.

Antistrophe β′.

One, one dame of eld, the story runs,
Lay murderous hands upon her sons;

Ino maddened by gods, when might of Zeus,
Her with distraction's goad from palace drove.
She fell, the wretch, into the bitter sea
For infanticide's repay.
Her foot-steps faltering o'er the brine-beat height,
She perished, too, by death's combining might.
What deed more dread, thou couch of vain delight?—
Such ills on mortals dost send!

[*Enter* JASON.]

JASON.

Ye women train who near this mansion stand,
Is she who perpetrated these foul crimes,
Medea, in these walls, or hath withdrawn
In flight? For she in truth must be concealed
Beneath the earth, or lift her wingéd form
Into the vast of heaven, would she not
Pay penalty unto the princes' house.
Doth hope the murderess of the potentates
Of Corinth to escape this roof unscathed?
Though not for her my thought concerned, as for
My children. Her, they whom she hath wrought ill
Shall ill repay; but I have come to save
The lives of my two sons, fearful Creon's
Kinsmen may do them hurt, in vengeance for
Their mother's godless guilt.

CHORUS.

Hapless, thou knowest not to what a pass
Thy misery, Jason, hath come; or such
Vain words as these thy lips would not express.

JASON.

What! doth her purpose aim to kill me too?

CHORUS.

By mother's hand thy sons have perishèd.

JASON.

My god! what say'st? How thou hast killed me, woman!

CHORUS.

Think of thy children as among the dead.

JASON.

Where slew she them, within the house or out?

CHORUS.

Unbar these doors, to see thy infants bleed.

JASON (*to slaves within*).

Undo the bolts with instant haste, O slaves;
Let turn the hinges, that this twice-fold horror
I may behold, my children slain, and her—
May punish for the murder.

[MEDEA *appears aloft in a chariot drawn by dragons, bearing the bodies of the children.*]

MEDEA.

Why dost thou rattle and uplift these doors,
Seeking the dead and me who wrought the deed?
Cease from such labor, and if thou wouldst aught
Of me, speak out thy wish; but never shalt
Thou gall me with thy touch; such chariot
My father's sire, Helios, presents to me
As refuge from a hostile hand.

JASON.

Thou scourge, thou all-detested woman to
The gods and me and all the human race,
Who hadst heart to implünge the sword into
The children of thy womb, leave childless me:
And thus imbrued dost look upon the sun
And earth, daring a deed most impious
Of impious. Perdition be thine end!
Late am I wise; how unwise then, when from
Thy roof and soil barbaric thee I led
To Grecian home, a mighty pest, to sire
Traitress and to the land which nurtured thee.
The Fury of revenge thy family
Which haunted, heavenly powers have hurled on me.

Red with thy brother slain upon his hearth,
Didst thou embark in Argo's fair-prowed hull:
Such thy beginning, then mated unto me
And bearing me two sons, for doting couch
Thou hast destroyed them.
There is no Grecian woman would have dared
This thing, and I preferred marrying thee
To one of them. A tie bitter to me
And ruinous, thou lioness, not woman,
Who hast a heart than Scylla more untamed,
The Tuscan monster. But I could not sting
Thee with ten thousand curses, such is thy
Unfeeling heart. Avaunt! disgraceful hag
And murderess of thy babes. To me is left
The wailing of my doom, not to enjoy
My nuptials new, nor have the power to speak
Farewell to them alive, sons I begot
And reared — now lost forever.

MEDEA.

Perchance I would reply at length to these,
Thy taunts, did not Zeus Sire the treatment know
Thou hast received from me, what done in turn.
Thou wast not to dishonor my true bed
And lead thy wanton pleasure to my scorn;

MEDEA.

Nor were the princess and Creon who gave
The bride, me unavenged to banish hence.
For this then call me lioness, an' thou
Dost please, and Scylla who dwelleth in the straits
Etruscan: for thy heart I've finely torn.

JASON.

Thou too art grieved; partaker of my pangs.

MEDEA.

Be thou assured; and yet grief profits me
If thou canst not deride.

JASON.

O babes, what fiendish mother have ye found!

MEDEA.

O sons, how perished by a father's lust!

JASON.

Yet my right hand drove not the fatal steel.

MEDEA.

Thy insolence and new-joined nuptials did.

JASON.

Deem'st thou it right to slay them for thy bed?

MEDEA.

A slight affair, dost think, unto a wife?

JASON.

If she be wise, O thou of every guile.

MEDEA.

But they are dead; for this will torture thee.

JASON.

They live — alas! — avengers on thy head.

MEDEA.

The gods know who began our misery.

JASON.

They surely know thy execrable heart.

MEDEA.

Abhor me; — but I loathe thy bitter sight.

JASON.

So do I thine: and easy parting then.

MEDEA.

How, pray? I long for this with all my soul.

JASON.

Allow me to inter these dead and mourn.

MEDEA.

Never, since I shall bury them with mine
Own hand, bearing them to the hallowed terms
Of Hera, goddess of the heights, that no
One of my foes may desecrate their graves
Uptorn. But in this land of Sisyphus
Myself shall institute a sacred feast
And rites forever, to atone for this
Unholy murder. Then I go unto
Erectheus' land to dwell with Ægeus,
Wise Pandion's son; but, as it is most right,
Thou, wretch, shall perish wretchedly, riven
Thy forehead by the Argo's wreck; seeing
The bitter issue of thy match with me.

JASON.

Oh! thee may the children's Erinys
And Justice, the murder-requiting,
Destroy!

MEDEA.

And who of the gods or of spirits
Heareth, violator of duties
To gods and to guests?

JASON.

Fye! fye! thou infanticide, loathsome.

MEDEA.

Go homeward, entomb thou thy princess.

JASON.

I go, of my two sons bereavéd.

MEDEA.

Thou grievest not yet; wait old age.

JASON.

O dearest of children!

MEDEA.

To me, not to thee.

JASON.

And yet thou destroyedst them?

MEDEA.

To anguish thy heart.

JASON.

Oh! wretch that I am, how I long for
The lips of my loved ones to kiss them.

MEDEA.

So now wouldst address them, cling to them;
Then, thou couldst thrust them away.

JASON.

Oh! by the gods, grant me to touch my
Dear ones' soft flesh.

MEDEA.

It can not be: vain thy petition.

JASON.

Zeus, hearest these words, how she thrusteth
Away me; and all that I suffer
This pest from — infanticide, tigress?—
Yet what I have power I do:
Lament and conjure while invoking
The gods to attest how Medea
Hath slain both my children; preventeth
From burying their bodies; whom would I
Had never, oh never begotten,
To witness them murdered by thee!

CHORUS.

Dispenser of manifold ends in Olympus
Is Zeus, and results manifold Heaven brings
Averse to desire. The expected unhappened,
The god hath evolved these astonishing things;
Thus commanded our lyre.